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AUTHOR Desmonde, Sue Sommer; Harms, Delores
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ABSTRACT

Since 1970, external degree programs (programs for adult students who cannot attend on-campus courses on a regular basis) have become an educational alternative for the adult woman returning to or entering an educational setting. These innovative programs are ideal for the woman who must integrate the roles of worker, mother and student. A pilot project was conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, involving 30 rural women who had returned to the University, many in the Extended Degree Program. Although the findings were similar to the other studies of the returning woman student, a different pattern of responses for the married and non-married student was found. For instance, significantly more nonmarried than married women were degree-oriented. Nonmarried women were more likely to state personal growth as one of their goals in relation to school. Also, they counted many more friends as support persons than did the marrieds. The project revealed that women must gain knowledge of how the system operates in order to participate in social policy development. (Author/BP)

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EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS

An Educational Alternative for Women*

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BY: Sue Sommer Desmonde
Delores Harms
University of Wisconsin-Superior
(In alphabetical order)

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EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS/AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE FOR WOMEN

I - STATUS AND NEEDS OF WOMEN

As we look at the education of women, and the needs and wants of the adult learner, it is important that we know the facts about our present living; the myths, the imaging of the future, and the impact women can have in shaping policy to achieve power over decisions that affect their lives. The structure and delivery system of higher education must be changed if women are to participate in society from the full range of human possibilities.

We are living out a transition period that is leaving behind beliefs and values about women's images, role responsibilities, and competencies, and moving to an ecological consciousness characterized by a person-centered society and role transcendance. The expansion of consciousness and its effect on the images women hold of themselves will be instrumental in changing the structure of society. This sense of consciousness is being felt in the emphasis on a humanitarian achievement ethic, a moral decision-making model based on human interaction, and belief systems and social ethics derived from a process of personal growth that is continuous. We must understand that adults' lives are as full of change, learning and growth as the lives of children.

In the process of moving to an expansion of consciousness, we need to be aware of the facts and the myths about women, and working women in particular. For example, women outnumber men in the population by seven million; there is an increasing number of women working away from home; most are married with school-age children; single-parent families headed by women on their own have grown ten times as fast as two-parent families in the last decade. As Alan Pifer stated in his 1976 Annual Report to the Carnegie Corporation, ". . . women are being drawn into the labor force today, not, as in World War II, by a temporary crisis but by powerful economic, demographic, and social forces and farreaching attitudinal changes. . . Women must work, they want to work, and their labor is needed.

Recognition of these realities should help us to institute new policies that not only make appropriate accommodations but spur wide-ranging reforms in many areas of life." [1]

The need to be self-supporting, inflation, changing beliefs about what is a decent standard of living, the demand for female labor in traditional women's jobs, and lowered fertility rates all combine to stimulate women to work. Laws prohibiting discrimination, providing equal opportunity, requiring employers to take Affirmative Action, and more opportunities for post-secondary education are raising women's qualifications and their expectations for employment.

As we look at the reality or facts and the myths of our beliefs about women, we need to ask ourselves: what is the reality about the adult woman, as worker, as learner; what are her roles, her responsibilities, to herself and to society? A society that is moving through a transition period must result in changes to the benefit of all if we are to even survive, much less improve and give emphasis to a quality of life that will be fulfilling and joyful.

Women are still in the position of trying to guarantee their own personal security. They are still trying to achieve an assured and decent standard of living. As Harlan Cleveland has said, ". . . the bulk of mankind is too busy making ends meet to worry much about the next goal after that. . . 12 to 20% of Americans are below somebody's definition of the poverty line." [2]

For most women, the present is filled with earning a living with low-level skills to be used on dull jobs that stifle the mind. For the women over 25, until recently, a college degree was a forgotten dream, something to put away in the trunk in the attic and only viewed as a memory.

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[1] Pifer, Alan. Women Working: Toward a New Society New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1976, p. 4.

[2] Cleveland, Harlan. "After Affluence, What?", The FUTURIST, October 1977, p. 279.

If it is indeed true that 41% of the women today are working not only for economic support, but for the sense of achievement and satisfaction that comes from using their skills and being recognized for it, and if our society needs a durable prosperity that is spread around in some egalitarian fashion, then we need to turn our attention to the future and look at the challenges and risks, and become involved in the planning of decisions.

First of all, should we reach some kind of durable prosperity, as Harlan Cleveland has stated, "how in the world, and where in the world will people find the excitement and challenge and sense of accomplishment that the majorities of previous generations have found in scratching for affluence."[3] New Zealanders have already reached this state, and the brightest and most ambitious young people are emigrating and not returning. Affluence is dull. Evidently it, too, stifles the mind as does dull, repetitive work.

We must learn to use economic security as a launching pad for adventure, for action. We need to find adventure in our working time, not primarily in our leisure time. When technology takes over the drudgery we used to endure, then what is left? The policy part of each task--the creative, planning, imagining, figuring out kind of work.

As growth becomes more complex, we will need a looser and more fluid administration of human affairs. Changing the structure of higher education is necessary since one of the characteristics of planning is its dynamism. This is a very powerful concept, since it includes a quick feedback cycle so that the organization can be self-modifying. The mode of planning then becomes more ambiguous, more challenging, and more open-ended.

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[3] Ibid, p. 281.

The general management of our society is already spread among a million or more leaders dealing with each other in horizontal relationships. We need people acting in their own places and functions as self-starting organizers, energizers, and innovators.

Alan Pifer has characterized our new society based on these four basic principles: "the right to a job for anyone who needs or wants to work; equal opportunity and fair rewards for everyone in all sectors of employment; development and utilization of the abilities of every citizen; and maximum flexibility for each person in the organization of his or her own pattern of life."[4]

These are some views of the future. We know the facts about the present, we know that the future can be invented. There are, then, a number of things that need to be done for women in educational institutions, if they are to transcend their present position.

New structures in education are being devised to meet the demands of our transitional society, and the Extended Degree Program is one kind of structure.

II - FACTORS AFFECTING THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

> "Education, like every other important entity of society, must be responsive to the world it serves or suffer from the constant danger of becoming static and lifeless. Its responses must be active, innovative, contemporary. And those who design education must do more than merely respond; they must develop initiatives of their own that reflect an awareness of changing necessities."[5]

Recently higher education has been forced to respond to many external factors, especially to the needs of a new and different clientele know as the nontraditional student, and to explore methods

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[4] Pifer, Alan, op. cit, p. 12

[5] Gould, Samuel B., Diversity by Design. San Francisco, CAl.: Jossey-Bass, 1975, p. 1.

to prepare the adult learner, especially women, to be successful in these fast developing programs.[6] The admissions statistics from these new programs reveal that over 50% of the nontraditional students are women. These are women who are self-supporting, working to maintain a higher standard of living for their families and are contributing to society. As the role of working women expands, the need for skills and knowledge obtained through education also expands. However, the adult learner cannot always utilize existing programs designed for full-time 18-22 year old students.

As a result, new structures and programs have been created by higher education institutions to provide educational opportunities for women and men which have never before been available. Before discussing these programs and their importance for women, let's briefly look at the factors which affected higher education institutions and in many ways forced the creation of external and extended degrees.

1) Increase in number of adult learners

The average age of students on campuses across the country is increasing. Veterans returning to school, women re-entering the educational setting and the increase in the perceived need for the degree, retraining and/or updating of skills has brought the older "nontraditional" student back to the classroom.

2) Decline in number of 18-22 year old students

Birthrates established 18 to 22 years ago cannot be changed. We know that the number of traditional college students will decline in the 1980's. This means that colleges and universities with expansive physical facilities and tenured faculty members must look to a different clientele to fully utilize resources.

3) "Stop-Outs"

It is not uncommon for the degree seeking student to "stop-out" and leave the formal educational setting for a period of time. We used

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[6]The Nontraditional Student for the Purpose of this study is defined as adults, including women and minorities, who are unable to utilize on-campus programs because of employment and family responsibilities as defined by Cyril O. Houle in The External Degree, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974, pp. 14-15.

to call these students "drop-outs", but experience has shown that they do return when life circumstances change. The students "stop-out" to work full-time, raise families, travel, or to get a different perspective on life before continuing.

4) Certification requirements

We are a credential conscious society. Professional organizations are endorsing increased formal training and require continued professional courses to maintain licenses or certification. The recent public statement by Chief Justice Burger regarding the inability of many lawyers to present a case in court is an example of the need to update and increase skills.

5) Economic situation

Inflation and the need for two family members to work in order to maintain a confortable standard of living has increased the number of adults who need to update skills or retrain for new positions. Among these workers are women who may have begun a college degree many years ago and are now returning to finish.

6) More women in higher education institutions

The economic situation cited previously and the changing role of women have been catalysts for women's increased participation in higher education institutions. A recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that women account for 93 percent of the increase in the number of students in higher education.[7]

7) National employment statistics

Recent Bureau of Labor statistics reports indicate that the average American worker changes jobs every two years before age 35. Also the average American worker is trained for a job requiring new skills at least four times during his or her lifetime. These changes require additional educational training and bring the older adult back to an educational setting. They are placing demands on higher education institutions to provide training in a more flexible manner.

8) Learning society concept

This is perhaps the most important factor. The learning society concept is based on the availability of learning opportunities within and outside the formal academic structures. Formal education would be spread throughout the life span and learners would be encouraged to move in and out of the educational setting

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[7] Magarrell, Jack, "Women Account for 93 Percent of Enrollment Gain," The Cronicle of Higher Education, Vol. XV, No. 17, January 19, 1978.

as they see the need to do so. Work opportunities and experience would be integrated with the formal learning structure and the responsibility for learning would be placed on the learner as well as on other institutions in society, not only the educational system. These are especially important for women as they fulfill the multiple roles of full-time worker outside the home, homemaker and mother.

The International Commission on the Development of Education sponsored by UNESCO published a report which reviewed international educational development and needs and asserted that fundamental alternatives to the very concepts and structures of education must be considered to create a learning society. This international commission recommended several guiding principles for educational policies. The following principles are specifically related to the concept of lifelong learning and a learning society.

> Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society.
>
> The dimension of living experience must be restored to education by redistributing teaching in time and space.
>
> Education should be dispensed and acquired through a multiplicity of means. The important thing is not the path an individual has followed, but what he has learned or acquired.
>
> Lifelong education, in the full sense of the term, means that business, industrial and agricultural firms will have extensive educational functions.
>
> An over-all open education system helps learners to move with it, both horizontally and vertically, and widens the range of choice available to them.
>
> The normal culmination of the education process in adult education.
>
> The new educational ethos makes the individual the master and creator of his own cultural progress. Self-learning, especially

> assisted self-learning, has irreplacable value in any educational system.[8]

Thus, the external environment of the American higher education institutions and multi-campus systems creates a changing, critical, demanding and challenging atmosphere in which to operate. The fiscal stringency, inflation, accountability demands, federal guidelines and projected enrollment decline coupled with the concept of lifelong learning, a learning society, and a changing clientele bringing needs for additional services and programs, are all planning variables for administrators in higher education today.

III - THE EXTERNAL DEGREE

In a speech delivered at the annual meeting of the College Board in October, 1970, Alan Pifer, President of the Carnegie Corporation, asked the question, "Is it time for an External Degree?" He pointed out that there were two major reasons for the interest in the external degree: 1) the growing national consensus that higher education should be available to everyone regardless of family and employment responsibilities or geographic location, and 2) the external degree provides an alternative route for individuals who desire to combine educational plans with travel and employment experience. They can move in and out of the educational setting. Pifer described what he called an obvious need for such an educational alternative.

> "There are many very able adults who because of physical handicaps, economic circumstances, responsibility for dependent parents, or other reasons simple never had a chance to go to college, even on a part-time basis. . . .To this group add large numbers of adult women who because of early marriage never completed their bachelor's degrees. . . .[9]

Pifer's call for external degrees was answered by colleges and universities across the country. One of the first was the State University

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[8]Faure, Edgar, et al., Learning to Be, Paris: UNESCO, 1972, pp. 181-222

[9]Pifer, Alan, "Is it Time for an External Degree?", College Board Review, No. 78 (Winter 1970-71), p. 5.

of New York (SUNY) multi-campus system. In 1971 SUNY created Empire State College to provide flexible, individualized programs to meet the needs of nontraditional adult students. It wasn't long before numerous variations of external degrees had been initiated by multi-campus systems, consortia of institutions, and individual public and private colleges and universities. A recent research project co-sponsored by the National Institute of Education reported that 134 external degree programs were enrolling students in the Fall of 1977.

External degrees may take many forms and can be found to include almost every disciplinary area. The external degree should also be differentiated from Continuing Education programs which provide additional training and interest courses but do not necessarily lead to the completion of a degree. A very broad definition of the external or extended degree, as it is often called, is a degree awarded to an individual on the basis of some program or preparation (devised whether by herself/himself or by an educational institution) which is not centered on traditional patterns of residential college or university study.[10]

Common components of external degree programs include the following:

ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING - The adult learner who has gained knowledge comparable to college level learning has the opportunity to document this learning. Faculty members assess the learners level of knowledge and may grant college level credit. This process may allow the learner to begin college work at an upper-class level, saving time and money.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION - Many, but not all external degree programs are competency-based. This means that the degree and course requirements are stated specifically in performance terms and that the criteria to assess whether the learner has achieved an adequate level of performance is also explicitly stated. Thus, it does not matter where or how the material was learned, as long as the learner can demonstrate adequate knowledge.

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PROGRAM - External degree program clientele are usually adults with varied backgrounds and educational goals. Many external degree

[10] Houle, Cyril O., The Extended Degree, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974, pp. 14-15.

programs allow the learner to design a unique degree program to meet individual career and educational goals. Others may have prescribed requirements, but how the student meets those requirements may be very flexible. The importance of the external degree is that it does not require all students to attend specific classes at given times in a specific location. The programs are for the most part time, space and location free.

CONTRACT LEARNING - Contract learning allows the student to contract with an instructor(s) for a certain number of credits or competencies (in competency-based education) in order to individualize the learning process. Not unlike a well organized independent study program, the student and the faculty member reach an agreement on the goals, performance requirements and assessment techniques for the learning contract.

Educational programs which include the above components place the responsibility for learning on the student. Often the student designs his or her own program with faculty assistance and much of the work is done away from the campus at a time and place convenient to the learner. The contact with faculty is decreased and may take place at the request of the student.

External degree programs have provided increased educational opportunities for women who because of family, employment and/or geographic location can not attend classes regularly. The woman who is working full time and the woman who is geographically isolated may find the external degree program an answer to her educational goals.

In an attempt to look at the specific needs of adult women returning to school, a pilot study was initiated at the University of Wisconsin-Superior in the Fall of 1977. Thirty adult women (age 25 or over) living in rural Northern Wisconsin were interviewed. Many were in the newly developed Extended Degree Program at UW-Superior. Since the program was new and little was known about the specific problems of women entering such a program, much of the interview was open ended. The following summaries, conclusions and recommendations are based on these informal pilot interviews and the experience of the authors. It is an initial attempt to identify the areas of

concern and difficulty experienced by women entering extended degree programs and to make recommendations and plan programs which will assist women to successfully complete these programs.

IV - PILOT PROJECT

There is a consistent pattern in the findings of this and similar studies done on the re-entry woman across the country. The barriers to educational progress reported by these women tended most of all to be attitudinal (either their own or their spouses' attitudes), followed by financial, scheduling, and transportation difficulties. A lack of self-confidence and the fear of being unable to do school work adequately were the two attitudes most commonly reported. Essentially, these returning women lacked a belief in their ability to fill any role, except perhaps that of homemaker, with any degree of success. Over half the women were not working at the time of the interview, which meant that the primary source of feedback was in the home.

Consistent with this lack of self-confidence and the limited vision these women have of themselves is the fact that most had never analyzed their own needs or created a personal educational or career plan. Other studies have uncovered this same phenomenon with depressing regularity. In their book, The Managerial Woman, Ann Jardim and Margaret Hennig state that even women in top managerial positions report a lack of long range planning:

> Traditionally, women have had great difficulty in making a decision as to whether they want a career and just as much difficulty in planning how to go about it. The concepts and tools needed to evaluate the true costs and rewards for them as women have been left out of most career planning exercises. Unable to analyze where they were going, women have been able to do little about where they were.[11]

This was amply illustrated by a group begun for re-entry women at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. The participants demonstrated that they did not possess the skills for group self-examination and growth, and were uncomfortable attempting such activity. Furthermore,

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[11] Hennig, Margaret and Anne Jardim, The Managerial Woman, New York: Anchor Press, 1977, p.

when asked if they would have liked more assistance from the University, a resounding 70% replied in the affirmative. Most of the women were relatively unaware of the services a college campus can offer. However, 49% desired more recognition by the University, 46% wanted more information on the development of a college career, and 34% wanted an orientation program for adult women returning to school.

Though married and nonmarried women experienced similar problems, there was a definite difference in the degree to which such problems were reported. For example, significantly more nonmarried (this category includes single, divorced, widowed, and separated women) than married women were degree-oriented, perhaps because of the economic reality of having only one income to live on. Nonmarried women were also more likely to state personal growth as one of their goals in relation to school. Interestingly, the nonmarried women also counted many more friends as support persons than did the marrieds. Most of the married women said their husbands offered some support, but they would have preferred more. This is born out by the self-reports of married women that ultimately it was their own attitudinal change, rather than encouragement from others, which brought them back to school. Also, although the nonmarrieds felt problems arose from the combination of their student and other roles significantly more than married women did, the nonmarrieds were more likely to have an improved self-image and self-respect due to their student experience. Overall, the group of nonmarried women had more self-direction than did the married women.

Married women reported interesting "before and after" feelings about school. Previous to attending, the married women anticipated large numbers of problems other than the previously mentioned ones which were unique to their own marital/domestic situations. These "other" problems worried the married women far more than the nonmarrieds. Once school had begun, however, significantly more married women thought school was fun and they were surprised at its growth-encouraging capacity.

One of the most important findings of the study was that 90% of all the women reported deriving benefits from attending school--despite all the obstacles to getting there and difficulties encountered once school was begun. Education needs to be thought of as part of life, not prior to or in addition to life. There needs to be an emphasis on human development in the curriculum, including such areas as decision-making skills, value exploration in human sexuality, career awareness and development, and assertiveness training--to name a few. It is important then that a series of personal development exercises be devised to help all women move toward the development of the full range of human possibilities.

V - RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Women need to be involved in the planning and development of social policy.

If women do not have the necessary skills, we need to provide the educational means to acquire them. This means that women must participate to a greater extent in nontraditional occupations, such as law and government. These are areas in which social policy decisions are made, and participating at the local level is vital if women are to realize their development from the full range of human possibilities. Beyond this, and perhaps more important, is a need to develop new curricular areas in higher education in academic disciplines that will be vital to secure the future of women and a participatory democratic society. This development will occur in areas where jobs have not yet been formed.

Likewise, the development of Extended Degree Programs on campuses has provided administrators with an opportunity to develop new policies which are sensitive to women returning to school For example, in the assessment of prior learning process adult learners submit documentation which is assessed by faculty members to determine college level learning acquired previous to entering an Extended Degree Program. Perhaps the most difficult experiences to assess include those ex-

periences most often submitted by women. Homemaking skills and knowledge and skills acquired through volunteer work are very difficult to document. Yet these experiences are often comparable to job experiences for which others are paid. In developing policies for assessment the specific problems related to women must be considered. Orientation procedures for Extended Degree Programs must also take into account the special needs of women. Administrators of these programs must be aware of these needs and as policy is developed insure that this policy does not prohibit or discourage the participation of women in these new programs.

B. Women must gain knowledge of the system, and how it operates.

Women need to understand that the value of individual success is being displaced by the value of societal success. The measure is no longer only the accumulation of personal wealth. Because most women have not been actively involved in the system for personal wealth, and because in many instances they have been shut out of the opportunities for gain, women need to be trained in analytic-informational skills, in community organization, relationship skills, and in the concepts of independence and interdependence and what this means for collaborating with other persons. Within nontraditional programs the orientation to a campus and the program must be continued. Women need the opportunity to participate in support groups and need the feedback which they can receive from other students, faculty and administrators.

It is especially important for the adult woman who is in a nontraditional program to have contact with other students in such a program. These programs allow the adult student to complete the majority of work off-campus. Therefore, unique organizational methods must be utilized so that such adults do have an opportunity to communicate with other students and faculty. This communication may be either by telephone, by mail, in support groups which meet off-campus, and/or periodic visits to the campus. In addition, the liaison person on the campus must be available to assist these off-campus students with the system.

C. Women must be encouraged to creatively build new structures based on new social policy.

Important changes are occurring in our social values. There is increased emphasis on social justice, aesthetics, humanitarianism, social consciousness, personal comfort and security, leisure, and internationalism. Social policy based on these values will need new structures for their expression. Women need to learn how to work across institutional lines, and how to best utilize resources and personnel--all within a context of ambiguity, uncertainty, and irregularity. Women who have been involved with External Degree Programs must integrate educational programs with existing resources. Women are often not as mobile as their male counterparts. They spend a great deal of time at home with children or in jobs which do not permit flexibility. Therefore, these working situations and the home must be utilized as resources to the greatest extent possible. This is especially important in a rural setting such as Northern Wisconsin. Most of the women students report that they do not intend to move or do not see the possibility of moving from the rural location. Therefore, it is essential they adequately assess the employment and educational opportunities in their area and utilize resources fully. Administrators and faculty members in non-traditional programs need to assist students in this assessment and allow as much flexibility as possible to utilize the limited resources in the rural setting.

D. Women need to initiate research into the consequences of new stresses due to life stage changes as a result of working, increased education and changes in social policy.

We need to research the experiencing of women's living, the clash of values, the new meanings that are evolving for that living, and the impact these changes are having on the moral decision-making of women. For example, we need to know how living and the meaning of it are the same or different for the never married woman, the full-time homemaker, the working homemaker, the single parent, the older woman over 62 years of age. This recommendation is a challenge to women, administrators, and faculty. In the educational setting we do not have adequate data on what happens to women once they enter an educational program. This data base is even more limited for the adult women returning to school.

E. We need to educate women to be role transcenders.

Women must become aware of their changing beliefs, attitudes and values, and trust their own experiencing. In order for women to participate in this democratic society from the full range of human possibilities, they need to move to a new plane of human consciousness based on who they determine they are (gender identity) rather than sex identity (because they are female). The social role of woman then is a result of utilizing the human potential and achieved skills in a constantly evolving process. Women need to understand that this social change will, and is, causing change in organization. They also need to understand that organizations in a society cause social changes. To be a role transcender actualizes an internal power source that can be used for broad social change. Role transcending starts with the individual woman. She must have gained the self-confidence to plan an educational program and a life program which will fully utilize her potential. The flexibility of Extended Degree Programs can allow for this type of self-skill development. However, an entry process to the nontraditional programs must assist incoming students to reach the level of self-confidence necessary to successfully develop and implement a life plan which is fulfilling, rewarding, and using potential.

F. We need to experiment with flexible arrangements of education, work, and family patterns.

The flexibility must be part of the planning for decisions, and therefore, women need to be taught adaptive strategies. Women need to view the present as an increment for that future that they are planning. They need to see that what they do today is a logical stepping stone on a planned path. This leads to full application at a particular target period in the future. Women need to be assisted in visualizing their individual and group roles in the future--social, vocational, and sexual possibilities. Education then becomes a part of life, not a preparation for life. These arrangements will help women transcend their sex role stereotyping. The Extended Degree Program requires the student to have a high level of motivation, self-discipline and an understanding of the concepts about nontraditional education. The program is flexible enough to allow students to combine the family, work and student roles; an essential requirement for women.

G. We need to adopt lifelong learning strategies for a learning society.

Knowledge has power today as never before, because we have become a knowledge society. Knowledge controls access to opportunity and advancement. Women must become risk takers. They must realize that the real purpose of education is personal learning, self-teaching, and self-training. As they develop their knowledge base, they must realize that human needs and values vary as an individual grows and develops. Through lifelong learning, women will be the masters and creators of their own cultural progress.

In the past women have not had the opportunity to participate fully in career planning. It has not been acceptable to rearrange family life style and budgets in order to accommodate the return of the woman to an educational setting. To begin an educational program is a form of risk taken by the adult. We must assist the adult woman and encourage her to take the risks necessary to utilize her potential. Only with a certain amount of risk can the woman student transcend the traditional roles of women. She can then proceed to creatively acquire skills and knowledge and plan and implement an educational and life plan which is satisfying, fulfilling, and using her potential.